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SOME EARLY ENGLISH FIRE-PLACES

WITH the development of country life in the United States the tendency is to build mansions approaching in size those of the old titled families of Europe. Even in certain parts of our cities houses of much larger dimension than formerly are being erected. As a result spacious interiors of the olden time can be studied with profit, not necessarily with a view to being copied with exactness but to their adaptability to modern conditions and individual taste.

The fire-place should always be a beautiful feature of a large interior. It can be stately, yet not forbidding; and in its decoration it may be made to form a link between the original family that gathered about it and the mansion itself. Even if the house be new, some family tradition can be suggested in the decoration of a large fire-place. The family coat-of-arms, for example, would lend itself readily to a decorative compartment above the mantel and thus, so long as the structure stood, be a reminder of its founder.

In some of the fine old English interiors the tradition preserved in the decoration of the huge fire-places is even more intimate than would be effected by the coat-of-arms alone. Take as an instance of this the chimney-piece in the drawing-room at Speke, Lancashire, about eight miles from Liverpool. The room is one of the finest apartments in the Kingdom. The chimney piece here is curiously and boldly

carved. For its theme it has three generations of the Norris family. Of these the center compartment is supposed to represent Sir Edward Norris with his two wives. The sons and daughters are shown in the compartment below. Beneath the whole elaborate decoration is the ample fire-place.

While Speke, in its present aspect, was built by Edward Norris in 1598, portions of the building long antedate that year. In fact it has been concluded by Nash, an authority on old English interiors, that a considerable portion of Speke was merely "restored" by Norris. Nash especially mentions the great hall of Speke, in which there is another fine fire-place, while, according to tradition, much of the black oak panelling was brought from Holyrood by Sir Edward after the battle of Flodden field, in which he showed so much courage that he was honoured by King Henry VIII. with a congratulatory letter for his services. Carved in one line on the frieze of the panelling referred to is this inscription:-

SLEPE: NOT: UNTIL: Y: HATHE: CONSEDERD:
HOW: THOW: HATHE: SPENT: Y: DAY: PAST:
IF: THOW: HAVE: WELL: DON: THANK: GOD:
IF: OTHER: WAYS: RE: PENT: Y: E: : : :

"I am inclined to think," writes Nash, "that not only this panelling but most of the carved wood-work of the interior of Speke is of earlier date than 1598. Certainly there is a palpable difference in the panelling of the hall from any that I have ever seen elsewhere.

Most of the old houses of any pretension in this and the neighboring counties are remarkable for fine wood-carving; but this, from its massive character and peculiarity of design, the bold execution of the heads and scroll-work, reminds one of the florid vigor of the Venetian carvers in wood." The Scotch are known to have employed foreign artists.

Speke is close to the Mersey and is an object of much interest in the neighborhood, being one of the most curious of the old moated half-timbered houses of the sixteenth century, which in some parts of Lancashire are designated "post and petrel," the latter probably a corruption of the French "poutreille," a cross-beam. The house forms a perfect quadrangle with the two fronts intact. Unlike the moat at Penshurst, which has been converted into a water garden, as described and illustrated in the April issue of *THE LOTUS*, the moat of Speke, although also a garden, is now dry. "Yet this does not detract from the picturesque appearance of the venerable fabric."

The old massive doors of Speke Hall still remain. They admit the visitor into a square court, where the spreading branches of two large yew trees touch the sides of the building in almost every direction, and impart a solemn air to the antique structure.

Few can be so inaccessible to cheery influences as to remain indifferent to that ingratiating feature in the picture of one of the superb fire-places at Loseley—the merrily blazing logs on the hearth. In the drawing which, like that of a fire-place at Levens, is one of Nash's best achievements, a cat is warming herself before the blaze. The lady

seated in an arm-chair is looking away from the pleasant gleam of the flames only because she has turned to regard her children who are playing with some puppies on a rug. These children are not shown in the reproduction of this drawing-room here, because the main purpose of the illustration is to show the fire-place.

Loseley is near Guilford, Surrey. The beautiful chimney-piece in the drawing-room and with its pillars of the Corinthian order is in an admirable state of preservation. There is a hard chalk peculiar to this part of the country, and it is out of this that the large grotesque figures that adorn the chimney-piece are carved. In the picture these figures are clearly shown and seen to be disposed, two on either side and in the manner of caryatides supporting the cornice of this elaborate chimney-piece. Its elaborateness, however, in no way interferes with its correlation to the family which anciently dwelt within the mansion, the Mores, through whose female line it descended in 1689 to the Molyneux. For down the centuries the many decorative compartments above the mantel-piece have borne, as there carved, if not the effigies of the More family, a record of its descent and alliances.

And what personages, royal and otherwise, have stood or sat before this noble chimney-piece, upon which the logs still burn!

For the Loseley manuscripts show that Queen Elizabeth certainly visited there several times, and in the mansion are two gilt needle-work chairs, with cushions, said to have been worked by her. She knighted Sir George More about the year 1597. On the 21st of



Fire-Place in Small Drawing-Room, Levens, Westmorland

August, 1606, Sir George was honoured by a visit from King James I., and in the beginning of August, 1617, he entertained the Prince of Wales at this place. Thus the grotesque figures of the Loseley chimney-piece have looked down upon a great queen, a king and a prince. Sir George often represented Surrey and its county town in Parliament. He is noticed in Nichol's "Progress of King James the First," as attending the funeral of that monarch in his office of Chancellor of the Garter. The Loseley manuscripts contain original letters under the signet of Henry VIII., and addressed to Christopher More, an acquittance for rent, etc., signed "Anna the Dowghter of Cleves" (Ann of Cleves, the unfortunate lady whom Henry VIII. married and afterwards divorced); original documents of King Edward VI.; many remarkable curious original letters and papers, illustrating the revels and dramatic entertainments of the English Court; and documents (some under the sign manual of Queen Mary) relating to Wyatt's Rebellion. One paper gives "the names of the Shyrefes of Surrye and Sussex that dyd burne the Inosents, wth the names of such whom they brent." This document contains the names of thirty different persons—residents of Surrey who were burned at the stake in the days of "bloody Mary."

The ceiling of the room which contains the chimney-piece that has been described, is shown to be adorned with tracery work in Gothic and with pendant corbels. A cockatrice is frequently introduced into the pattern of the ornament. On the cornice is a rebus intended to apply to the family of More, a mulberry tree (*morus*) with the motto,

"*Morus tarde moriens morum cito moritorium*;" meaning that, like the mulberry tree, the family stock should long endure, though the individual members would, like the fruit of the tree, go to speedy decay;—a rebus that time did not justify, since the last male issue of the stock died, as we have seen, in 1689.

The antiquity of the manor of Loseley may be appreciated by the fact that it is the Losele of the Domesday Book, that invaluable record made by order of William the Conqueror. In Saxon times the manor belonged to the Crown; but, after the conquest, William gave it to his kinsman, Roger de Montgomery, together with the earldoms of Arundel and Shrewsbury, and vast possessions in various parts of England, as a reward for the zeal and ability Roger had displayed at Hastings, where he led the center of the Norman army. By forfeiture, descent, or purchase, the estate having come into the hands of the families of Westbrook and Cross respectively, was at length purchased by Christopher More, who became owner of the Manor, in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of Henry VIII. It was William, eldest son of Sir Christopher More, who began to build the main or central portion of the mansion at Loseley, in 1562, and completed it in 1568, his work remaining to this day.

Painted on the wainscot of the great hall is a monogram composed of the letters H. K. P., for Henry and Katharine Parr, which immediately suggests the monogram of Henri II. and Diana de Poitiers and causes one to retrace one's thoughts from Loseley to Anet. Sir George More, who has been men-

tioned, was the second member of the family to be knighted by Elizabeth. In May, 1576, the founder of the present mansion received the honour of knighthood at the hands of the Earl of Leicester, in the Earl of Lincoln's garden, at Pirfold, in Surrey, the Queen being present, and on his being permitted to kiss her hand, told him that he well deserved the honour she had conferred upon him; a personal touch one likes to associate with the hospitality and the genial warmth from its fire-place, both of which the Queen had enjoyed.

In the two drawing-rooms of Levens, Westmoreland, the smaller of which is now termed the library, the two compartments of the panelling are lozenge-like in form. While the large drawing-room of Levens is the grander of the two apartments, the chimney-pieces in both rooms are very fine. The carving on the chimney-piece in the larger room consists of shields of the Bellinghams, with the arms of Elizabeth in the center, arranged between pilasters of the Corinthian and composite order. Corbet Anderson calls attention to the elegance of the design.

THE LOTUS pictures the fire-place in the small drawing-room, or library, because it is of quite a different character from those that have been described. It is enriched by allegorical figures which, considering the period when they were executed, and the bold-

ness with which they are carved, show considerable grace. The two lower figures forming the sides of the fire-place represent Samson and Hercules; the three above, with the two lying at the extremities of the pediment, the five senses; and the two compartments contain emblematical figures of the four Elements and the four Seasons. Along the entablature below runs the following inscription:

THVS THE FIVE SENSES STAND PORTRAITTED HERE
SAMPSON SUPPORTS THE ONE SIDE AS IN RAGE
THE ELEMENTS FOVRE AND SEASONS OF THE YEAR
THE OTHER HERCVLES IN LIKE EQUIPAGE.

That the slender figure of the lady seated and reading, adds greatly to the charm of the picture of this chimney-piece, will hardly be gainsaid.

The hall and estate have great age. They were purchased by the younger son of the Bellinghams, of Burneshead, from the Redmans. In this family the property had been vested ever since 1188. It was a descendant of this Alan Bellingham, who, about 1686, sold Levens to Colonel James Graham, younger brother of Sir Richard Graham, of Netherby, Privy Purse to James II. and afterwards Viscount Preston. His only daughter married Henry Bowes Howard, Earl of Berkshire, from whom the property descended by female heirs to the Honourable Mary Howard, herself a descendant from Thomas, fourth Duke of Norfolk, who was attainted and beheaded, June 2nd, 1572.



FIRE-PLACE IN DRAWING-ROOM
LOSELEY, SURREY